

# An Analysis of “A Statement”

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Since the editor of the "American Lutheran" saw fit to publish "A Statement" together with its accompanying letter, and thus make public to the world a matter which was regarded, and perhaps also intended, to be of a private nature, the author does not believe it to be unethical and un-Christian also to publish "An Analysis of A Statement."

At the very outset we wish to state that we do not impugn the motives of the signers of the Statement; for we believe that they acted in good faith, with the best intention. We intend to judge the Statement on its own merits and on the meaning its paragraphs convey.

The more important parts of the Statement, to which we must take exception, are contained in Points 5 and 11, although they are also reflected in Points 6 and 8. It is necessary, however, that we should first call attention to the charges raised against the pastors of our Synod in several other Points.

We admit that the various things, mentioned as tendencies in our Synod, are, indeed, very wicked and sinful, and must be avoided by all of us, and where found, be repented of. We also admit that, because of our old Adam, every pastor may here and there become guilty of one or the other of the things charged. Yet, the signers of this document do not refer to these things as dangers against which we all must constantly be on our guard, but they deplore facts which they believe to have observed among our pastors in "more than one area of our beloved Synod."

Furthermore, these facts are not mentioned as isolated cases that have happened here and there, but they are described as *tendencies*. Now, a tendency is much more than an occasional lapse, of which each one of us may at times have been guilty; a tendency is something more permanent, and, if in more than one area of Synod, something more general. It is an inclination, a drift in a certain direction, a proneness and disposition towards something. Now we are told that there exists among the ~~pastors~~ of the Missouri Synod a tendency toward the wicked things the Statement mentions. This, certainly, is a grave accusation.

This accusation is made *publicly*, without any proof what-ever; it is made *indiscriminately*, no one knows who is meant. And because this Statement is made by men in prominent posi-

tions, it is likely that many a one will be led to believe that such wicked tendencies actually exist among our pastors.

If the signatories wanted to call us to repentance, they should certainly not have broadcast such blanket accusations, but should have dealt with the guilty ones separately; or they should in true humility have reminded themselves and us that we are always in danger of doing such things. To make the public accusation that there is "in our Synod a tendency to substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scriptures"—let us well ponder what this means—is by no means an Evangelical way of doing a thing; and besides this, it is not true. For if there is a ministry that has been trained, and is in our conferences continually being trained to base its doctrines and practices on "sola scriptura," it is the ministry of our Synod. And I do not believe that there is a tendency among our pastors to do what they are charged with in Point 2 of the Statement.

But we are told, "We do not mean you and you." Well, who, then, is meant? Does not the very fact that such charges are made create a mutual suspicion among us? I may not find myself guilty of the sin charged in Point 2. Who is? The brethren in the East or in the West, or in my conference? Where are the areas in which these wicked things have developed?

And what effect will the Statement with its grievous charges have on our people? They have heard of it, and will hear more of it. Will they not suspect their own pastors?

And what effect will it have on those outside of our Synod? For let us not be so simple as to think that they will not get hold of this Statement. They will say, "At last some men in the Missouri Synod have seen the light, they are here accusing their own brethren of the very things of which we have accused the entire Missouri Synod."

If I were to publish a statement, in which I deplore the tendency in our Synod to break down the Scriptural injunctions concerning Church-fellowship, and to institute a more liberal policy and practice—and perhaps I could now do this on the basis of this Statement and of other documentary evidence in my possession—would I not justly be taken to task for making such a sweeping statement without offering proof? Would I not be accused of a loveless attitude for exposing this liberal tendency in this way by simply raising grievous charges against some brethren in Synod?

I do not object to calling attention to the ever-present danger of doing one or the other thing mentioned in the Statement; nor do I object to making specific charges against any brother, who may be guilty of one of these things, for the purpose of setting him right. But I do resent that such grievous charges are made

publicly and indiscriminately against an unnamed group of our pastors without proof and evidence.

These charges must, furthermore, be viewed in their setting. They do not refer to any such instances as may have occurred in the past, but to a very definite set and kind of reactions among our pastors, which the 44 brethren believe to have observed since the Saginaw Convention. This is very clear from the letter which accompanied the Statement and from the Statement itself.

Now what were the questions that agitated our pastors in recent years and especially since the Saginaw Convention? Ever since 1938 the issue discussed pro and con among us was Church-fellowship and union with other Lutheran bodies. And consider furthermore the aim of the Statement as it appears especially in Points 5 and 11. It is in this setting that the charges are made against those pastors in our Synod who have criticized and condemned the liberal views of others. It is possible that in the heat of argument harsh words and judgments were uttered, that these men have not always been "suaviter in modo." But is it fair to accuse them of such things as are mentioned in Points 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Statement? Is it not possible that the conscience of these men was bound by the Word of God, and that zeal for this Word prompted them to speak and to act? Is it fair to charge them with "arrogant presumptuousness that this new, strange, and utterly un-Lutheran spirit presents itself as the last word in orthodoxy, and the final competent judge to determine who is and who is not a safe leader in the Church and the true representative of historical Lutheranism"? Does anyone deny that if a pastor or a teacher or a professor departs from any clear point of the Word of God, he may no longer be regarded as a safe leader in the Church? We are here discussing principles, and not men. I for one hold that if anyone departs much or little, to the right or to the left, from the Word of God, and will not return to the Law and the Prophets, Is. 8:19, 20, then he is not a safe leader. Is. 3:12. And if this be "arrogant presumptuousness," make the most of it.

The signers of the Statement may not quote I Tim. 5:20 in defense of their procedure. The specific sins which they charge were not public. Nor may they refer to I Cor. 5:1; for it is not commonly reported that such things as are charged in the Statement actually exist in certain areas of our Synod. Most of us have learned of these terrible things only through the Statement.

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But let us take up the principal point of the Statement. We read Point 5: "We therefore deplore the fact that Rom. 16:17, 18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America." Let us

note, in passing, that the Statement admits that in the past this text has been so applied in our Synod, and this is true, as may be seen from the writings of the fathers up to the Brief Statement, ¶ 28. But this fact is here deplored. There is here, on the part of the signatories of the Statement, a clear and conscious departure from the position of our Synod.

Point 5 of the Statement is practically the same as what Dr. Brux has in the closing paragraph of an extended exegesis on Rom. 16:17, 18. He writes: "In view of this, can we with any show of right and justice, apply Rom. 16: 17, 18 to Lutheran bodies which are not affiliated with us, or to other Christian denominations who stand on the same foundation, Christ, with us, but differ in some doctrines that do not overthrow the foundation?" Dr. Brux goes a step farther than the Statement does in Point 5, inasmuch as he holds that this text must not be applied to *any Christian denomination* which still stands with us on the same foundation, on Christ.

Dr. Reu (In the interest of Lutheran Unity, p. 42) agrees with Dr. Brux. He says: "Strictly speaking, one cannot infer from this text that we Lutherans are in duty bound to separate from non-Lutherans; we have this duty, of course, but this text, in its primary meaning, does not express this."

The argumentation lying behind Point 5 of the Statement will, therefore, be practically the same as that which Dr. Brux advances in his treatise. It is briefly this: The men, who might also in Rome cause divisions and offenses were the *Judaizers*, who said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" Acts 15:1. These men were no Christians, for they denied the central doctrine of the Gospel. The "doctrine," therefore, to which Paul refers, was *not any doctrine* of the Word of God, but specifically the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. Any one who denies *this doctrine*, does not serve Christ, but his own belly, he deceives the simple with good words, and must by all means be avoided.

If this be correct, then we must avoid those who, denying the fundamental truths of the Gospel, are no Christians, while we may, as far as this text is concerned, enter into church-fellowship with all Christians, who still trust in the merits of Christ for their salvation, but who do not agree with us in other doctrines of the Bible. Therefore, as far as this text is concerned, the door would be wide open for church-fellowship with *any Christian denomination*, which still adheres to the fundamental truths of the Gospel.

The "proton pseudos" of the whole argument is that those "who cause divisions and offenses" is limited to the *Judaizers*, and "the doctrine" is limited to the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith in Christ.

We do not deny that Paul was thinking also of the Judaizers; for he had his trouble with them in the Eastern churches, in Antioch and Galatia. But to say that in our text Paul refers exclusively to them and to their attack on the central doctrine of the Gospel is a pure assumption for which there is not the least evidence in the text. Yet it is on this assumption that the whole argument is based. Paul was thinking also of others. In the same year that he wrote his letter to the Romans, he had a conference at Miletus with the elders of the congregation of Ephesus, and in his farewell address he told them: "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and unto all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock, also *of your own selves* shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw the disciples after them." Acts 20, 27-30. Here Paul is thinking not only of Judaizers, but also of others, who shall arise from among the clergy of the church; nor is he speaking of the one fundamental doctrine only, but of the whole counsel of God, and that includes all doctrines. And the history of doctrine shows that throughout the ages all heresies and false doctrines originated within the Church, churchmen teaching perverse things.

If any one would maintain that Rom. 16: 17, 18 applies only to those well known Judaizers Paul had in mind, and who were known also to the Christians at Rome, then this text would be of no use to us whatsoever. For those Judaizers are dead, and by what right could we apply this text to any man now living? But the matter of fact is that Paul was thinking not only of a specific group of men outside of the Church, such as the Judaizers and the pagan philosophers that might attack the central doctrine of the Gospel, but, as Acts 20:27-30 clearly shows, also of men within the Church who would teach perverse things not in agreement with the whole counsel of God. It is, therefore, a pure assumption to say, and to make others believe, that this text does not apply to Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. If any one, on his own authority, would limit the application of this text to non-Christians who attack our doctrine, we, on the authority of Paul himself, shall apply this text to any one inside or outside of the Church who teaches perverse things.

But we are told that the definite article "tous" before "poiountas" forces us to think of a very definite group of disturbers that were known to the Christians at Rome. We answer, the definite article is required because the participle "poiountas" is here used independently and is not connected with a noun or pronoun, and because of its verbal nature it has an object, "the divisions and the offenses." In German we would say "Die Zer-trennung und Aegernis Wirkenden." In such cases the participle

usually takes the definite article. (See Blass, Grammer of the New Testament, p. 156.)

The definite article before "the" divisions and "the" offenses is required, because there were other divisions and offenses in the congregation of that day. In Corinth there were divisions in the church; some said they were of Paul, others, they were of Apollos, etc., I Cor. 1:12. In the same congregation there were divisions and offenses regarding the eating of meat that had been offered to idols, I Cor. 8. The same thing was true in the *congregation at Rome*, as we see from Rom. 14. From these and similar divisions and offenses Paul in Rom. 16:17 distinguishes the divisions and offenses contrary to *the doctrine*. And therefore the definite article is used.

Again, it is quite arbitrary to limit the word "doctrine" to the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the Law, just because the definite article is here used. This article is required because of the following relative clause. Paul does not mean any kind of doctrine, but the doctrine they had learned, and which he had taught them in this very epistle. Would it not be exceedingly strange that the Apostle, who in his pastoral letters so strongly insists on "sound doctrine," Tit. 1:9, on "un-corruptness in doctrine," Tit. 2:7, "teach no other doctrine" I Tim. 1:3, should in his most important letter to the Romans refer to *one specific doctrine only*, and leave the way open for aberrations in other doctrines?

The basic mistake in the argument of Dr. Brux and his followers is this: that it limits the meaning and application of Rom. 16:17, 18 to the Judaizers and their ilk, and asserts that the word "doctrine" in our text can refer only to the fundamental doctrine, which it is necessary to know and believe for our salvation, and that, therefore, we are to avoid those only who deny and attack this one doctrine, while we may have church fellowship with all those "Christian denominations who stand on the same foundation, Christ, with us, but differ in some doctrines that do not overthrow the foundation."

We challenge any one to prove from the words of this text and from its immediate and remote context, or from the "Schrift-ganze" that such is the right meaning of this text. Let us not quote human authorities, but stick to the text. And the text is by no means dark and difficult, but it is so plain that even our simple Christians, without the aid of a learned doctor, can understand that we must avoid all those who cause and perpetuate divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine they have learned from the Bible.

But we are told that v. 18 clearly shows that *Christians*, who err in some points of doctrine, cannot be meant. For we read, "They that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts

of the simple." There are sincere Christians among the laity and the clergy of other Christian denominations, that differ from us in certain points of doctrine. And therefore v. 18 cannot apply to them, and if v. 18 does not apply to them, then v. 17 cannot be applied to them, and therefore this text does not forbid us to have church fellowship with them.

Let us see. If the things mentioned in v. 18 are the *marks* by which we are to recognize the causes of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine, then we must strike this text from our Bibles; then we cannot use this text against any one. For how can we determine that any one is not serving Christ? He certainly will not tell us so. How can we determine that he is serving his own belly? He will surely not reveal this to us. How do we know that he intends to deceive the hearts of the simple? Even the most rabid Judaizer would not be such a fool as to make his evil intentions known. We have been told that we must certainly use this text against errorists and false teachers, but only against those who do not serve Christ, but serve their own belly, and who intend deliberately to deceive the simple. But as it is impossible to discover this for a certainty, it is impossible to use this text against any one.

But Rom. 16: 17, 18 is by no means a superfluous text. Let us note, in v. 18 Paul does not give us the *marks*, by which we can recognize those whom we must avoid, but it states the *reason* why we should avoid them. Whoever teaches any other doctrine than the Word of God teaches, does not serve Christ, but his own belly, and he deceives the simple that follow him. No errorist, whether he be sincere or not, will present his error openly and clumsily, but he will use plausible and seemingly convincing arguments that will easily deceive the simple, and, if it were possible, the very elect. And every error in doctrine is a sin, a "skandalon," which is likely to entrap the unwary. Furthermore, Paul does not say a word about the *intention* of these men; he simply states the *fact* that they do deceive. Whether or not an errorist *intends* to deceive, we cannot determine, because we cannot read his heart; but that he *does* deceive we can determine by the false doctrines he teaches. While, therefore, v. 18 tells us *why* we should avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned, it does not give us the description and the marks by which we can recognize those whom we must avoid. We recognize these men not by what Paul tells us about them in v. 18, but by the divisions and offenses they cause contrary to the doctrine of the Bible, as we see from v. 17.

It is therefore contrary to the text to limit the application of v. 17 to those only concerning whom we have in some mysterious way learned that they do not serve Christ, but their own belly, and intend to deceive us.

But what does it mean when Paul says that they, who cause

divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned from the Bible, do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ?

The doctrines these people had learned were not the doctrines of men but of Christ, and in His doctrines they must continue faithfully, if they would be and remain His disciples, as He Himself tells us, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." See also Matt. 28: 20. If any one, therefore, causes divisions and offenses contrary to this doctrine, then he is manifestly not serving the Lord Jesus. It matters not whether he is doing this wilfully or ignorantly, thinking in his own mind that what he teaches is correct and true; nor does it matter whether his departure from the Word is in a fundamental or non-fundamental doctrine; the fact that he teaches or believes something that is contrary to the Bible shows that he is not continuing in the words of the Master, and is therefore not serving the Lord Jesus. This does not mean that he is no Christian; for if his error does not pertain to the fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, it is possible that he holds his error in ignorance and that would not kill his faith. Yet *no one will be ready to say that in teaching any kind of false doctrine one is serving Christ*, Matt. 15: 9. And this is what Paul wishes to impress upon the Christians at Rome, that these men, who cause these divisions and these offenses that run contrary to that doctrine which they had learned, are not serving Christ, and therefore they should avoid them.

But what is meant when it is said, they serve "their own belly"? If we take the word "belly" in its broad and vulgar sense, it would mean that these men serve their personal interests, their own ambition, that they are working in the church for the money or honor they expect to get out of it. In this sense we certainly cannot apply these words to every one who by false teaching has caused division and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Scriptures. In this sense I am not ready to say that every preacher and priest outside of our Synod is a "belly server," nor am I ready to say that there are no "belly servers" among the orthodox ministers of the Missouri Synod. Whether or not anyone is in this sense a "belly server" is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to determine. In this sense these words do *not* apply to all teachers of false doctrine, and therefore this cannot be the meaning of our text.

But since Paul says that they who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Bible *are* "belly servers," these words must have a different meaning. The word, which is translated with "belly," is "koilia" in Greek. In John 7:38 Christ uses this very word; "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The word here means "the innermost heart of the believer, which pours forth spiritual refreshment." (Vincent). The word "koilia" is here used very much like the word "bowels, splagchna" denoting the heart, the seat of feeling in a person. And we are strongly inclined to take "belly" in our text in this sense, mean-

ing, that whenever anyone teaches anything contrary to the Bible, then he does not get his ideas out of the Bible, but he evolves and develops them out of his own mind and heart. Thus, when the Reformed deny the Real Presence in the Sacrament, they do not get this out of the words of Christ, but out of their own reason. Erroneous teachings never have their origin and source in the Word of God, but in the ideas and thoughts of men. Therefore, to the extent that one departs from the Word of God, he is not serving Christ, but himself, his own "belly." And *this is true in every case*, for he is putting his own ideas into the text, and thus substituting his thoughts for the thoughts of God. Again, the point is not that a person does this knowingly and wilfully; he may be very sincere in what he teaches, as many priests and preachers no doubt are; yet the fact remains that to the extent that they teach and uphold doctrines or details of doctrines contrary to the Word of God, they are not serving Chirst, but their own "koilia."

Whether or not v. 18 applies to anyone, can be determined in no other way than by finding out whether the things he teaches agree with the Word of God, Acts 17:11. And when anyone does cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Word, then v. 18 applies to him in full force.

Now let us take up the word "avoid." It seems to us that the Statement in Point 9 charges us with extending this word "to any and every contact between Christians of different denominations." We are supported in this view by paragraphs in one of the essays delivered at the meeting of the 44. There we read: "This word (avoid) is so interpreted as to mean that we can and dare have no spiritual contact with any who are not in complete and absolute accord with us in every point of doctrine. It alleges that to have such contact is 'unionism,' and to pray with such persons is a transgression of the Lord's command: 'Avoid them.' If this interpretation were correct, then we could not even carry out the most elementary command to do mission work. If we must *avoid* all of the people who are not in absolute and perfect accord with us in every point of doctrine, then we must withdraw from the world, then we cannot even have social intercourse with others or engage in business transactions with them. Let us be honest, if 'avoid' means 'avoid' the persons concerned, then to shake the hand of a non-Missouri Synod Christian is sinful. To marry such a person must then be a heinous crime." The writer of these words evidently does not understand the text, and would heap ridicule on our position.

Let us apply his own words, if he really meant them, to his own position. We assume that he really believes that we must *avoid* those who, like the Judaizers of old, overthrow the very foundation of our faith. We have such people in our day, the modern Jews, Communists, Unitarians, etc. These we must *avoid*, and Dr. Brux and his followers, who would limit our text to such

people only as cause divisions and offenses contrary to the one central doctrine of the Bible, will agree that, indeed, we must *avoid* them. Now let us be honest, *avoid* means *avoid*, we must not have any social contact with them, must not transact business with them, must not even shake hands with them. We wonder whether the writer of that essay would within the limited application he makes of Rom. 16:17 carry out what he believes the word "avoid" to mean, and what he insinuates that we mean.

But let us be serious, the word "avoid" must be understood in its context. Paul is not speaking of social and business contacts, nor of missions, nor of the common rules of conventional intercourse among men; but he is speaking of those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Bible. It is in this sphere that we must avoid them. We should not listen to these men when they teach false doctrines, we should not do anything that might give countenance to their false teaching, as when we join in worship with them, we should not support their false teaching, as when we contribute of our means to advance their effort. The word "avoid" does not forbid each and every contact with them, but only such contacts as are related to their false teaching. And such contacts are established when we worship with them, commune with them, exchange pulpits with them, preach one of a series of sermons they have arranged for their congregation. Yes, let us be honest, and not expand the application of this word beyond what Paul tells us in this text.

We do not apply the term "unionism" to any and every contact between Christians of different denominations, and there is in our Synod no tendency to do this; and we deplore that such an accusation has been made in Point 9 of the Statement. We apply this term only to contacts with other denominations whereby we either deny the plain truth of the Bible or tacitly give countenance to the error held by others. That is what the text says; nothing more. This does not prevent us from doing mission work. When Paul was in Athens, he did not merely set forth the truth of the Gospel positively, but he also pointed out the superstition and idolatry of the Athenians. When our missionaries contact the heathen, they not only state positively what the Gospel teaches, but also point out the errors and the futility of their pagan religion. When Christ dealt with the scribes and Pharisees and various individuals, He did not merely tell them of the promises of God's grace, but He pointed out to them the error of their way. When we discuss doctrines with men of other church bodies, we do not merely state positively what the truth is, but we also point out where they have erred. No, we do not avoid all contacts with Christians of other denominations, not even with heathen men; but we are ready to meet them and discuss doctrine with anyone with the view of convincing the gainsayer.

But we are mindful also of the words of Paul, Tit. 3:10: "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition

reject." Even as we exclude the manifestly impenitent sinner from the Christian congregation after all efforts to restore him have failed, so we must exclude from our congregations those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned to be true from the Word of God. Teaching a false doctrine is just as much a sin before God as when a person is an habitual drunkard. Now, we do not wish to be understood as though we regarded everybody outside of our church who holds to erroneous doctrines to be a manifestly impenitent sinner; for there are perhaps more Christians outside of the Missouri Synod than there are in the Missouri Synod. But the point is this that, when all our efforts to convince an errorist fail, we finally reach a point where we must part company and avoid him and reject him.

That is what our fathers did. Yes, "Luther worshipped with Eck, the Catholic, at Leipzig in 1519, and with Zwingli at Marburg in 1529. Our founding fathers attended free, intersynodical conferences with representatives of other Lutheran synods, with whom they were not in doctrinal agreement. They worshipped and participated with them in full divine services and in brief devotional exercises at Columbus, Ohio, in 1856; at Pittsburgh, Pa., in 1857; at Cleveland, Ohio, in 1858; at Ft. Wayne, Indiana, in 1859." And we admit that we may be doing this to this very day; we worship together with a brother who has erred from the truth. Yet, in all these cases the issue is not yet definitely settled; the lines of division are not finally fixed. Marburg is a good illustration. The Reformed and the Lutherans had practically agreed on all points of doctrine, especially on the fundamental doctrines. But they did not agree on the Real Presence in the Sacrament, which is not a fundamental doctrine in the sense that it is necessary for salvation. Now when all efforts failed, and Zwingli stuck to his error, Luther denied him the hand of fellowship, and the reason was not the relative importance of this doctrine, but the different spirit Zwingli manifested with regard to the Word of God. It was the "Schriftprinzip" that was in question. And we have no information that Luther afterwards still worshipped together with Zwingli. In like manner our fathers continued to worship together with men of other synods, but the divisions contrary to the doctrine of the Bible were not yet firmly established. As an example we refer to the controversy on predestination. We met with the men of Ohio, who were still in the Synodical Conference, and we would have continued to discuss the doctrine with them, but *they* withdrew and separated from us. Since then the lines have been definitely drawn, and other points of difference have been added in the meantime, (plenary inspiration). The division having been caused by them, the things which brought on this division must be removed before we can join with them.

Quoting Luther and the fathers in support of a contemplated practice to worship together with those who do not agree with

us in doctrine, simply beclouds the issue. There the cleavage was not yet definite and fixed; here it has existed for many years. This does not mean that if other church bodies wish to discuss differences in doctrine with us in order to reach an agreement, we should refuse to meet them; on the contrary, we should be glad to meet them, God may bless our efforts and a full agreement may be reached. But in the meantime we may not simply ignore the differences in doctrine as though they did not exist, and as long as these bodies uphold and defend their error, there can be no fellowship with them.

For this reason Point 11 of the Statement must be rejected, despite the resolution of Synod in 1938, as quoted in the Statement. We may not ignore "details of doctrine." If the detail is really a part of the doctrine, plainly taught in Holy Writ, then our obedience to God demands that we insist also on this detail. The question is not whether the detail is important and fundamental or not, but whether it is taught in the Word of God. It is the "Schriftprinzip" that is in question. No man has the right to regard and treat a detail of a truly Scriptural doctrine as insignificant; we must accept and observe *all* that God has revealed to us in His Word. We tremble at His Word.

If, on the other hand, a detail of doctrine cannot be established from Scripture, then that detail is not a part of the divine doctrine, and need not and should not be accepted as such.

From Points 5 and 11 it appears to us that the Statement wants to break away from the present position of our Synod, and to introduce a more liberal policy with regard to church fellowship. Limiting Rom. 16: 17, 18 to non-Christians, who deny the fundamental truth of the Gospel, the Statement does not want this text applied to Christians, who in other points of doctrine cause divisions and offenses in the Church. We have shown above that this text must be applied to *all* who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Bible.

However, it may be necessary to define "church fellowship" more clearly. A Church is a body of Christians with a distinctive doctrine and confession, a denomination, such as the Catholic, the Baptist, the Lutheran Church. Church fellowship manifests itself in joint public services of the members of these churches, in altar and pulpit fellowship, and in every public function in which these churches or their officers act as representatives of the peculiar doctrine each church holds.

According to Rom. 16: 17, 18 we may fitly distinguish between the *causers* of these divisions and offenses, and the *simple*, who are deceived by them. The *causers* of these divisions and offenses, and those who uphold and perpetuate these divisions and offenses we must "avoid." But this does not include every social, human and business contact with them, but only such contacts by which we would support or condone their error. We do not avoid them

as neighbors, but as errorists. It is their error and false doctrine that we must shun, and against which we must testify. Inter-synodical conferences, in which we discuss divergences in doctrine, and endeavor to convince the gainsayer, are certainly not forbidden, Tit. 1: 9.

Neither do we apply this text to every spiritual contact between Christians of different denominations; for such contacts may be of a personal and private nature, and do not necessarily involve an agreement with the doctrinal position of the other party, as when in a hospital a suffering and dying Baptist asks a Lutheran missionary to comfort him and to pray with him; or when a Lutheran Christian visits his Catholic neighbor, who is ill and much depressed because of his sins, like Luther was in the monastery, it would not be contrary to our text if the Lutheran Christian, as opportunity offers, instructs and comforts the Catholic and prays with him. In such and similar cases the question of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine does not enter the picture. Here the Lutheran Christian acts as a royal priest of God, and not as the representative of the Lutheran Church. Such spiritual contacts are not to be regarded as *church* fellowship.

Yet, Point 11 speaks of *church* fellowship, and would have us believe that complete agreement in doctrine and practice is not necessary for such fellowship. With this we cannot agree. As by joining a local congregation we endorse its doctrinal position, even so by entering into formal fellowship with a heterodox body we automatically approve its doctrinal aberrations. And this we must not do. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Amos 3:3.

In the light of this chief purpose of the Statement we must understand Point 2. Since our Synod has in the past applied Rom. 16: 17 to all errorists, also to those who within the Church have caused divisions and offenses, and since this fact is deplored in Point 5, Synod, according to the view of the Statement, falls under the condemnation of Point 2, in that we "substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of the Scripture."

For the same reason Synod falls under the judgment of Point 3, which deplores "all man-made walls and barriers and all ecclesiastical traditions, which would hinder the free course of the Gospel in the World." It is quite incomprehensible to us how such a statement could be made. These man-made walls and barriers etc. could not be deplored if the signers of the Statement did not believe that they exist within our Synod. But where has our Synod ever erected any barriers to real and true mission work?

However, also this Point must be understood in the light of the purpose of the Statement. The Statement is not urging us to do more aggressive and intensive mission work in *the world and*

*among the unchurched*, but this Point rather refers to "various occasions of a public or ecclesiastical character," to which any one may be invited to bear witness to his faith, it refers to bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel among *members of other churches, which already have the Gospel*; it refers to preaching a sermon in a sectarian church, or to preaching one of a series of sermons arranged to prove that there is no difference in the principal doctrines among the various churches, whose pastors participate in the series. A service is a public affair of a congregation, and preaching a sermon in such a service is indeed a case of church fellowship, except if in that sermon we testify for the truth and against the error held by said congregation. This is what Christ and the Apostles did when they met with groups or individuals that held erroneous views. Within the framework of the Statement we can think of no other field in which the signatories may want to "preach the Gospel in all its truth and power" than those Christian churches which already have the Gospel, but do not yet agree with us in every point of doctrine.

But let us bear in mind, church fellowship is a reciprocal affair, it works both ways. If I accept an invitation to preach, say, in a Methodist church, the Methodist brother may justly expect an invitation to preach in my church. And church fellowship includes altar and pulpit fellowship. Are our pastors and our congregations ready to establish such church fellowship with any Christian church body which does not agree with us in doctrine?

No, our Synod has not erected barriers against preaching the Gospel to the unchurched and to the heathen, but in Rom. 16:17 God has erected a barrier against church fellowship with errorists.

The entire Statement must be studied in the light of its dominant purpose as this appears from the accompanying letter and especially from Points 5 and 11, namely that we introduce into our Synod a more liberal policy of church fellowship, to wit, that we no longer make differences in certain doctrines or in details of doctrine divisive of church fellowship.

In Point 5 of the Statement the fact is admitted that Rom. 16: 17, 18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. And this has, indeed, been the position of our Synod in the past. But this fact is deplored. Hence we have here on the part of all the signatories of the Statement a *conscious departure from, and an open break with, the position of our Synod* on this particular point.

Since the Statement deplores the fact that the text was so applied, it must regard the position of our Synod as unscriptural and wrong, and therefore Synod is guilty of "substituting human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scripture," Point 2.

Since Synod has so applied the text, and does not permit pulpit fellowship with churches that do not agree with us in doctrine, Synod is charged with erecting "man-made walls and barriers, and all ecclesiastical traditions which would hinder the free course of the Gospel in the world," Point 3, and with "narrow legalism," Point 1.

In Point 4 of the Statement we are charged with "a loveless and unscriptural attitude," which manifests itself in various ways. We ask the reader to study carefully Points 1, 2, and 3 of the Statement, also the letter which accompanied the Statement, and an essay "Protest and Appeal," which was read at the meeting of the 44, and then ask himself who has made more grievous charges and manifested a more loveless and unscriptural attitude.

The Statement must be rejected, and should be retracted, "in toto."

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# **An Analysis of**

## **“A Statement”**

**BY**

**DR. E. W. A. KOEHLER**

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Since the editor of the "American Lutheran" saw fit to publish "A Statement" together with its accompanying letter, and thus make public to the world a matter which was regarded, and perhaps also intended, to be of a private nature, the author does not believe it to be unethical and un-Christian also to publish "An Analysis of A Statement."

At the very outset we wish to state that we do not impugn the motives of the signers of the Statement; for we believe that they acted in good faith, with the best intention. We intend to judge the Statement on its own merits and on the meaning its paragraphs convey.

The more important parts of the Statement, to which] we must take exception, are contained in Points 5 and 11, although they are also reflected in Points 6 and 8. It is necessary, however, that we should first call attention to the charges raised against the pastors of our Synod in several other Points.

We admit that the various things, mentioned as tendencies in our Synod, are, indeed, very wicked and sinful, and must be avoided by all of us, and where found, be repented of. We also admit that, because of our old Adam, every pastor may here and there become guilty of one or the other of the things charged. Yet, the signers of this document do not refer to these things is dangers against which we all must constantly be on our guard, but they deplore facts which they believe to have observed among our pastors in "more than one area of our beloved Synod."

Furthermore, these facts are not mentioned as isolated cases that have happened here and there, but they are described as *tendencies*. Now, a tendency is much more than an occasional lapse. of which each one of us may at times have been guilty; a tendency is something more permanent, and, if in more than one area of Synod, something more general. It is an inclination, a drift in a certain direction, a proneness and disposition towards something. Now we are told that there exists among the pastors of the Missouri Synod a tendency toward the wicked things the Statement mentions. This, certainly, is a grave accusation.

This accusation is made *publicly*, without any proof whatsoever; it is made *indiscriminately*, no one knows who is meant. And because this Statement is made by men in prominent posi-

tions, it is likely that many a one will be led to believe that such wicked tendencies actually exist among our pastors.

If the signatories wanted to call us to repentance, they should certainly not have broadcast such blanket accusations, but should have dealt with the guilty ones separately; or they should in true humility have reminded themselves and us that we are always in danger of doing such things. To make the public accusation that there is “in our Synod a tendency to substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scriptures”—let us well ponder what this means—is by no means an Evangelical way of doing a thing; and besides this, it is not true. For if there is a ministry that has been trained, and is in our conferences continually being trained to base its doctrines and practices on “sola scriptura,” it is the ministry of our Synod. And I do not believe that there is a tendency among our pastors to do what they are charged with in Point 2 of the Statement.

But we are told, “We do not mean you and you.” Well, who, then, is meant? Does not the very fact that such charges are made create a mutual suspicion among us? I may not find myself guilty of the sin charged in Point 2. Who is? The brethren in the East or in the West, or in my conference? Where are the areas in which these wicked things have developed?

And what effect will the Statement with its grievous charges have on our people? They have heard of it, and will hear more of it. Will they not suspect their own pastors?

And what effect will it have on those outside of our Synod? For let us not be so simple as to think that they will not get hold of this Statement. They will say, “At last some men in the Missouri Synod have seen the light, they are here accusing their own brethren of the very things of which we have these many years accused the entire Missouri Synod.”

If I were to publish a statement, in which I deplore the tendency in our Synod to break down the Scriptural injunctions concerning Church-fellowship, and to institute a more liberal policy and practice—and perhaps I could now do this on the basis of this Statement and of other documentary evidence in my possession — would I not justly be taken to task for making such a sweeping statement without offering proof? Would I not be accused of a loveless attitude for exposing this liberal tendency in this way by simply raising grievous charges against some brethren in Synod?

I do not object to calling attention to the ever-present danger of doing one or the other thing mentioned in the Statement; nor do I object to making specific charges against any brother, who may be guilty of one of these things, for the purpose of setting him right. But I do resent that such grievous charges are made

publicly and indiscriminately against an unnamed group of our pastors without proof and evidence.

These charges must, furthermore, be viewed in their setting. They do not refer to any such instances as may have occurred in the past, but to a very definite set and kind of reactions among our pastors, which the 44 brethren believe to have observed since the Saginaw Convention. This is very clear from the letter which accompanied the Statement and from the Statement itself.

Now what were the questions that agitated our pastors in recent years and especially since the Saginaw Convention? Ever since 1038 the issue discussed pro and con among us was Church-fellowship and union with other Lutheran bodies. And consider furthermore the aim of the Statement as it appears especially in Points 5 and 11. It is in this setting that the charges are made against those pastors in our Synod who have criticized and condemned the liberal views of others. It is possible that in the heat of argument harsh words and judgments were uttered, that these men have not always been "suaviter in modo." But is it fair to accuse them of such things as are mentioned in Points 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Statement? Is it not possible that the conscience of these men was bound by the Word of God, and that zeal for this Word prompted them to speak and to act? Is it fair to charge them with "arrogant presumptuousness that this new, strange, and utterly un-Lutheran spirit presents itself as the last word in orthodoxy, and the final competent judge to determine who is and who is not a safe leader in the Church and the true representative of historical Lutheranism"? Does anyone deny that if a pastor or a teacher or a professor departs from any clear point of the Word of God, he may no longer be regarded as a safe leader in the Church? We are here discussing principles, and not men. I for one hold that if anyone departs much or little, to the right or to the left, from the Word of God, and will not return to the Law and the Prophets, Is. 8:19, 20, then he is not a safe leader. Is. 3:12. And if this be "arrogant presumptuousness," make the most of it.

The signers of the Statement may not quote I Tim. 5:20 in defense of their procedure. The specific sins which they charge were not public. Nor may they refer to I Cor. 5:1; for it is not commonly reported that such things as are charged in the Statement actually exist in certain areas of our Synod. Most on us have learned of these terrible things only through the Statement.

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But let us take up the principal point of the Statement. We read Point 5: "We therefore deplore the fact that Rom. 16:17, 18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. It is our conviction, based on sound exegetical and hermeneutical principles, that this text does not apply to the present situation in the Lutheran Church of America." Let us

note, in passing, that the Statement admits that in the past this text has been so applied in our Synod, and this is true, as may be seen from the writings of the fathers up to the Brief Statement, ¶ 28. But this fact is here deplored. There is here, on the part of the signatories of the Statement, a clear and conscious departure from the position of our Synod.

Point 5 of the Statement is practically the same as what Dr. Brux has in the closing paragraph of an extended exegesis on Rom. 16:17, 18. He writes: "In view of this, can we with any show of right and justice, apply Rom. 16:17, 18 to Lutheran bodies which are not affiliated with us, or to other Christian denominations who stand on the same foundation, Christ, with us, but differ in some doctrines that do not overthrow the foundation?" Dr. Brux goes a step farther than the Statement does in Point 5, inasmuch as he holds that this text must not be applied to *any Christian denomination* which still stands with us on the same foundation, on Christ.

Dr. Reu (In the interest of Lutheran Unity, p. 42) agrees with Dr. Brux. He says: "Strictly speaking, one cannot infer from this text that we Lutherans are in duty bound to separate from non-Lutherans; we have this duty, of course, but this text, in its primary meaning, does not express this."

The argumentation lying behind Point 5 of the Statement will, therefore, be practically the same as that which Dr. Brux advances in his treatise. It is briefly this: The men, who might also in Rome cause divisions and offenses were the *Judaizers*, who said, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved" Acts 15:1. These men were no Christians, for they denied the central doctrine of the Gospel. The "doctrine," therefore, to which Paul refers, was *not any doctrine* of the Word of God, but specifically the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law. Any one who denies this doctrine, does not serve Christ, but his own belly, he deceives the simple with good words, and must by all means be avoided.

If this be correct, then we must avoid those who, denying the fundamental truths of the Gospel, are no Christians, while we may, as far as this text is concerned, enter into church-fellowship with all Christians, who still trust in the merits of Christ for their salvation, but who do not agree with us in other doctrines of the Bible. Therefore, as far as this text is concerned, the door would be wide open for church-fellowship with *any Christian denomination*, which still adheres to the fundamental truths of the Gospel.

The "proton pseudos" of the whole argument is that those "who cause divisions and offenses" is limited to the Judaizers, and "the doctrine" is limited to the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith in Christ.

We do not deny that Paul was thinking also of the Judaizers; for he had his trouble with them in the Eastern churches, in Antioch and Galatia. But to say that in our text Paul refers exclusively to them and to their attack on the central doctrine of the Gospel is a pure assumption for which there is not the least evidence in the text. Yet it is on this assumption that the whole argument is based. Paul was thinking also of others. In the same year that he wrote his letter to the Romans, he had a conference at Miletus with the elders of the congregation of Ephesus, and in his farewell address he told them: "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and unto all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock, also of *your own selves* shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw the disciples after them." Acts 20, 27-30. Here Paul is thinking not only of Judaizers, but also of others, who shall arise from among the clergy of the church; nor is he speaking of the one fundamental doctrine only, but of the whole counsel of God, and that includes all doctrines. And the history of doctrine shows that throughout the ages all heresies and false doctrines originated within the Church, churchmen teaching perverse things.

If any one would maintain that Rom. 16: 17, 18 applies only to those well known Judaizers Paul had in mind, and who were known also to the Christians at Rome, then this text would be of no use to us whatsoever. For those Judaizers are dead, and by what right could we apply this text to any man now living? But the matter of fact is that Paul was thinking not only of a specific group of men outside of the Church, such as the Judaizers and the pagan philosophers that might attack the central doctrine of the Gospel, but, as Acts 20:27-30 clearly shows, also of men within the Church who would teach perverse things not in agreement with the whole counsel of God. It is, therefore, a pure assumption to say, and to make others believe, that this text does not apply to Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. If any one, on his own authority, would limit the application of this text to non-Christians who attack our doctrine, we, on the authority of Paul himself, shall apply this text to any one inside or outside of the Church who teaches perverse things.

But we are told that the definite article "tous" before "poiountas" forces us to think of a very definite group of disturbers that were known to the Christians at Rome. We answer, the definite article is required because the participle "poiountas" is here used independently and is not connected with a noun or pronoun, and because of its verbal nature it has an object, "the divisions and the offenses." In German we would say "Die Zertrennung und Aegernis Wirkenden." In such cases the participle

usually takes the definite article. (See Blass, *Grammar of the New Testament*, p. 156.)

The definite article before “the” divisions and “the” offenses is required, because there were other divisions and offenses in the congregation of that day. In Corinth there were divisions in the church; some said they were of Paul, others, they were of Apollos, etc., I Cor. 1:12. In the same congregation there were divisions and offenses regarding the eating of meat that had been offered to idols, I Cor. 8. The same thing was true in the *congregation at Rome*, as we see from Rom. 14. From these and similar divisions , and offenses Paul in Rom. 16:17 distinguishes the divisions and offenses contrary to *the doctrine*. And therefore the definite article is used.

Again, it is quite arbitrary to limit the word “doctrine” to the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the Law, just because the definite article is here used. This article is required because of the following relative clause. Paul does not mean any kind of doctrine, but the doctrine they had learned, and which he had taught them in this very epistle. Would it not be exceedingly strange that the Apostle, who in his pastoral letters so strongly insists on “sound doctrine,” Tit. 1:9, on “uncorruptness in doctrine,” Tit. 2:7, “teach no other doctrine” I Tim. 1:3, should in his most important letter to the Romans refer to *one specific doctrine only*, and leave the way open for aberrations in other doctrines ?

The basic mistake in the argument of Dr. Brux and his followers is this: that it limits the meaning and application of Rom. 16: 17, 18 to the Judaizers and their ilk, and asserts that the word “doctrine” in our text can refer only to the fundamental doctrine, which it is necessary to know and believe for our salvation, and that, therefore, we are to avoid those only who deny and attack this one doctrine, while we may have church fellowship with all those “Christian denominations who stand on the same foundation, Christ, with us, but differ in some doctrines that do not overthrow the foundation.”

We challenge any one to prove from the words of this text and from its immediate and remote context, or from the “Schriftganze” that such is the right meaning of this text. Let us not quote human authorities, but stick to the text. And the text is by no means dark and difficult, but it is so plain that even our simple Christians, without the aid of a learned doctor, can understand that we must avoid all those who cause and perpetuate divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine they have learned from the Bible.

But we are told that v. 18 clearly shows that *Christians*, who err in some points of doctrine, cannot be meant. For we read, “They that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts

of the simple." There are sincere Christians among the laity and the clergy of other Christian denominations, that differ from us in certain points of doctrine. And therefore v. 18 cannot apply to them, and if v. 18 does not apply to them, then v. 17 cannot be applied to them, and therefore this text does not forbid us to have church fellowship with them.

Let us see. If the things mentioned in v. 18 are the *marks* by which we are to recognize the causes of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine, then we must strike this text from our Bibles; then we cannot use this text against any one. For how can we determine that any one is not serving Christ? He certainly will not tell us so. How can we determine that he is serving his own belly? He will surely not reveal this to us. How do we know that he intends to deceive the hearts of the simple? Even the most rabid Judaizer would not be such a fool as to make his evil intentions known. We have been told that we must certainly use this text, against errorists and false teachers, but only against those who do not serve Christ, but serve their own belly, and who intend deliberately to deceive the simple. But as it is impossible to discover this for a certainty, it is impossible to use this text against any one.

But Rom. 16:17, 18 is by no means a superfluous text. Let us note, in v. 18 Paul does not give us the *marks*, by which we can recognize those whom we must avoid, but it states the *reason* why we should avoid them. Whoever teaches any other doctrine than the Word of God teaches, does not serve Christ, but his own belly, and he deceives the simple that follow him. No errorist, whether he be sincere or not, will present his error openly and clumsily, but he will use plausible and seemingly convincing arguments that will easily deceive the simple, and, if it were possible, the very elect. And every error in doctrine is a sin, a "skandalon," which is likely to entrap the unwary. Furthermore, Paul does not say a word about the *intention* of these men; he simply states the *fact* that they do deceive. Whether or not an errorist *intends* to deceive, we cannot determine, because we cannot read his heart; but that he *does* deceive we can determine by the false doctrines he teaches. While, therefore, v. 18 tells us *why* we should avoid those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned, it does not give us the description and the marks by which we can recognize those whom we must avoid. We recognize these men not by what Paul tells us about them in v. 18, but by the divisions and offenses they cause contrary to the doctrine of the Bible, as we see from v.. 17.

It is therefore contrary to the text to limit the application of v. 17 to those only concerning whom we have in some mysterious way learned that they do not serve Christ, but their own belly, and intend to deceive us.

But what does it mean when Paul says that they, who cause

divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned from the Bible, do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ?

The doctrines these people had learned were not the doctrines of men but of Christ, and in His doctrines they must continue faithfully, if they would be and remain His disciples, as He Himself tells us, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed." See also Matt. 28: 20. If any one, therefore, causes divisions and offenses contrary to this doctrine, then he is manifestly not serving the Lord Jesus. It matters not whether he is doing this wilfully or ignorantly, thinking in his own mind that what he teaches is correct and true; nor does it matter whether his departure from the Word is in a fundamental or non-fundamental doctrine; the fact that he teaches or believes something that is contrary to the Bible shows that he is not continuing in the words of the Master, and is therefore not serving the Lord Jesus. This does not mean that he is no Christian; for if his error does not pertain to the fundamental doctrine of the Gospel, it is possible that he holds his error in ignorance and that would not kill his faith. Yet *no one will be ready to say that in teaching any kind of false doctrine one is serving Christ*, Matt. 15: 9. And this is what Paul wishes to impress upon the Christians at Rome, that these men, who cause these divisions and these offenses that run contrary to that doctrine which they had learned, are not serving Christ, and therefore they should avoid them.

But what is meant when it is said, they serve "their own belly"? If we take the word "belly" in its broad and vulgar sense, it would mean that these men serve their personal interests, their own ambition, that they are working in the church for the money or honor they expect to get out of it. In this sense we certainly cannot apply these words to every one who by false teaching has caused division and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Scriptures. In this sense I am not ready to say that every preacher and priest outside of our Synod is a "belly server," nor am I ready to say that there are no "belly servers" among the orthodox ministers of the Missouri Synod. Whether or not anyone is in this sense a "belly server" is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to determine. In this sense these words do *not* apply to all teachers of false doctrine, and therefore this cannot be the meaning of our text.

But since Paul says that they who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Bible *are* "belly servers," these words must have a different meaning. The word, which is translated with "belly," is "koilia" in Greek. In John 7:38 Christ uses this very word; "Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The word here means "the innermost heart of the believer, which pours forth spiritual refreshment." (Vincent). The word "koilia" is here used very much like the word "bowels, splagchna" denoting the heart, the seat of feeling in a person. And we are strongly inclined to take "belly" in our text in this sense, mean-

ing, that whenever anyone teaches anything contrary to the Bible, then he does not get his ideas out of the Bible, but he evolves and develops them out of his own mind and heart. Thus, when the Reformed deny the Real Presence in the Sacrament, they do not get this out of the words of Christ, but out of their own reason. Erroneous teachings never have their origin and source in the Word of God, but in the ideas and thoughts of men. Therefore, to the extent that one departs from the Word of God, he is not serving Christ, but himself, his own “belly.” And *this is true in every case*, for he is putting his own ideas into the text, and thus substituting his thoughts for the thoughts of God. Again, the point is not that a person does this knowingly and wilfully; he may be very sincere in what he teaches, as many priests and preachers no doubt are; yet the fact remains that to the extent that they teach and uphold doctrines or details of doctrines contrary to the Word of God, they are not serving Christ, but their own “koilia.”

Whether or not v. 18 applies to anyone, can be determined in no other way than by finding out whether the things he teaches agree with the Word of God, Acts 17:11. And when anyone does cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Word, then v. 18 applies to him in full force.

Now let us take up the word “avoid.” It seems to us that the Statement in Point 9 charges us with extending this word “to any and every contact between Christians of different denominations.” We are supported in this view by paragraphs in one of the essays delivered at the meeting of the 44. There we read: “This word (avoid) is so interpreted as to mean that we can and dare have no spiritual contact with any who are not in complete and absolute accord with us in every point of doctrine. It alleges that to have such contact is ‘unionism,’ and to pray with such persons is a transgression of the Lord’s command: ‘Avoid them.’ If this interpretation were correct, then we could not even carry out the most elementary command to do mission work. If we must *avoid* all of the people who are not in absolute and perfect accord with us in every point of doctrine, then we must withdraw from the world, then we cannot even have social intercourse with others or engage in business transactions with them. Let us be honest, if ‘*avoid*’ means ‘*avoid*’ the persons concerned, then to shake the hand of a non-Missouri Synod Christian is sinful. To marry such a person must then be a heinous crime.” The writer of these words evidently does not understand the text, and would heap ridicule on our position.

Let us apply his own words, if he really meant them, to his own position. We assume that he really believes that we must *avoid* those who, like the Judaizers of old, overthrow the very foundation of our faith. We have such people in our day, the modern Jews, Communists, Unitarians, etc. These we must *avoid*, and Dr. Brux and his followers, who would limit our text to such

people only as cause divisions and offenses contrary to the one central doctrine of the Bible, will agree that, indeed, we must *avoid* them. Now let us be honest, *avoid* means *avoid*, we must not have any social contact with them, must not transact business with them, must not even shake hands with them. We wonder whether the writer of that essay would within the limited application he makes of Rom. 16:17 carry out what he believes the word “*avoid*” to mean, and what he insinuates that we mean.

But let us be serious, the word “*avoid*” must be understood in its context. Paul is not speaking of social and business contacts, nor of missions, nor of the common rules of conventional intercourse among men; but he is speaking of those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Bible. It is in this sphere that we must avoid them. We should not listen to these men when they teach false doctrines, we should not do anything that might give countenance to their false teaching, as when we join in worship with them, we should not support their false teaching, as when we contribute of our means to advance their effort. The word “*avoid*” does not forbid each and every contact with them, but only such contacts as are related to their false teaching. And such contacts are established when we worship with them, commune with them, exchange pulpits with them, preach one of a series of sermons they have arranged for their congregation. Yes, let us be honest, and not expand the application of this word beyond what Paul tells us in this text.

We do not apply the term “unionism” to any and every contact between Christians of different denominations, and there is in our Synod no tendency to do this; and we deplore that such an accusation has been made in Point 9 of the Statement. We apply this term only to contacts with other denominations whereby we either deny the plain truth of the Bible or tacitly give countenance to the error held by others. That is what the text says; nothing more. This does not prevent us from doing mission work. When Paul was in Athens, he did not merely set forth the truth of the Gospel positively, but he also pointed out the superstition and idolatry of the Athenians. When our missionaries contact the heathen, they not only state positively what the Gospel teaches, but also point out the errors and the futility of their pagan religion. When Christ dealt with the scribes and Pharisees and various individuals, He did not merely tell them of the promises of God’s grace, but He pointed out to them the error of their way. When we discuss doctrines with men of other church bodies, we do not merely state positively what the truth is, but we also point out where they have erred. No, we do not avoid all contacts with Christians of other denominations, not even with heathen men; but we are ready to meet them and discuss doctrine with anyone with the view of convincing the gainsayer.

But we are mindful also of the words of Paul, Tit. 3:10: “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition

reject." Even as we exclude the manifestly impenitent sinner from the Christian congregation after all efforts to restore him have failed, so we must exclude from our congregations those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine we have learned to be true from the Word of God. Teaching a false doctrine is just as much a sin before God as when a person is an habitual drunkard. Now, we do not wish to be understood as though we regarded everybody outside of our church who holds to erroneous doctrines to be a manifestly impenitent sinner; for there are perhaps more Christians outside of the Missouri Synod than there are in the Missouri Synod. But the point is this that, when all our efforts to convince an errorist fail, we finally reach a point where we must part company and avoid him and reject him.

That is what our fathers did. Yes, "Luther worshipped with Eck, the Catholic, at Leipzig in 1519, and with Zwingli at Marburg in 1529. Our founding fathers attended free, intersynodical conferences with representatives of other Lutheran synods, with whom they were not in doctrinal agreement. They worshipped and participated with them in full divine services and in brief devotional exercises at Columbus, Ohio, in 1856; at Pittsburgh, Pa., in 1857; at Cleveland, Ohio, in 1858; at Ft. Wayne, Indiana, in 1859." And we admit that we may be doing this to this very day; we worship together with a brother who has erred from the truth. Yet, in all these cases the issue is not yet definitely settled; the lines of division are not finally fixed. Marburg is a good illustration. The Reformed and the Lutherans had practically agreed on all points of doctrine, especially on the fundamental doctrines. But they did not agree on the Real Presence in the Sacrament, which is not a fundamental doctrine in the sense that it is necessary for salvation. Now when all efforts failed, and Zwingli stuck to his error, Luther denied him the hand of fellowship, and the reason was not the relative importance of this doctrine, but the different spirit Zwingli manifested with regard to the Word of God. It was the "Schriftprinzip" that was in question. And we have no information that Luther afterwards still worshipped together with Zwingli. In like manner our fathers continued to worship together with men of other synods, but the divisions contrary to the doctrine of the Bible were not yet firmly established. As an example we refer to the controversy on predestination. We met with the men of Ohio, who were still in the Synodical Conference, and we would have continued to discuss the doctrine with them, but *they* withdrew and separated from us. Since then the lines have been definitely drawn, and other points of difference have been added in the meantime, (plenary inspiration). The division having been caused by them, the things which brought on this division must be removed before we can join with them.

Quoting Luther and the fathers in support of a contemplated practice to worship together with those who do not agree with

us in doctrine, simply beclouds the issue. There the cleavage was not yet definite and fixed; here it has existed for many years. This does not mean that if other church bodies wish to discuss differences in doctrine with us in order to reach an agreement, we should refuse to meet them; on the contrary, we should be glad to meet them, God may bless our efforts and a full agreement may be reached. But in the meantime we may not simply ignore the differences in doctrine as though they did not exist, and as long as these bodies uphold and defend their error, there can be no fellowship with them.

For this reason Point 11 of the Statement must be rejected, despite the resolution of Synod in 1938, as quoted in the Statement. We may not ignore "details of doctrine." If the detail is really a part of the doctrine, plainly taught in Holy Writ, then our obedience to God demands that we insist also on this detail. The question is not whether the detail is important and fundamental or not, but whether it is taught in the Word of God. It is the "Schriftprinzip" that is in question. No man has the right to regard and treat a detail of a truly Scriptural doctrine as insignificant; we must accept and observe all that God has revealed to us in His Word. We tremble at His Word.

If, on the other hand, a detail of doctrine cannot be established from Scripture, then that detail is not a part of the divine doctrine, and need not and should not be accepted as such.

From Points 5 and 11 it appears to us that the Statement wants to break away from the present position of our Synod, and to introduce a more liberal policy with regard to church fellowship. Limiting Rom. 16:17, 18 to non-Christians, who deny the fundamental truth of the Gospel, the Statement does not want this text applied to Christians, who in other points of doctrine cause divisions and offenses in the Church. We have shown above that this text must be applied to *all* who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine of the Bible.

However, it may be necessary to define "church fellowship" more clearly. A Church is a body of Christians with a distinctive doctrine and confession, a denomination, such as the Catholic, the Baptist, the Lutheran Church. Church fellowship manifests itself in joint public services of the members of these churches, in altar and pulpit fellowship, and in every public function in which these churches or their officers act as representatives of the peculiar doctrine each church holds.

According to Rom. 16: 17, 18 we may fitly distinguish between the *causers* of these divisions and offenses, and the *simple*, who are deceived by them. The causers of these divisions and offenses, and those who uphold and perpetuate these divisions and offenses we must "avoid." But this does not include every social, human and business contact with them, but only such contacts by which we would support or condone their error. We do not avoid them.

as neighbors, but as errorists. It is their error and false doctrine that we must shun, and against which we must testify. Intersynodical conferences, in which we discuss divergences in doctrine, and endeavor to convince the gainsayer, are certainly not forbidden, Tit. 1: 9.

Neither do we apply this text to every spiritual contact between Christians of different denominations; for such contacts may be of a personal and private nature, and do not necessarily involve an agreement with the doctrinal position of the other party, as when in a hospital a suffering and dying Baptist asks a Lutheran missionary to comfort him and to pray with him; or when a Lutheran Christian visits his Catholic neighbor, who is ill and much depressed because of his sins, like Luther was in the monastery, it would not be contrary to our text if the Lutheran Christian, as opportunity offers, instructs and comforts the Catholic and prays with him. In such and similar cases the question of divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine does not enter the picture. Here the Lutheran Christian acts as a royal priest of God, and not as the representative of the Lutheran Church. Such spiritual contacts are not to be regarded as *church* fellowship.

Yet, Point 11 speaks of *church* fellowship, and would have us believe that complete agreement in doctrine and practice is not necessary for such fellowship. With this we cannot agree. As by joining a local congregation we endorse its doctrinal position, even so by entering into formal fellowship with a heterodox body we automatically approve its doctrinal aberrations. And this we must not do. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed Amos 3:3.

In the light of this chief purpose of the Statement we must understand Point 2. Since our Synod has in the past applied Rom. 16:17 to all errorists, also to those who within the Church have caused divisions and offenses, and since this fact is deplored in Point 5, Synod, according to the view of the Statement, falls under the condemnation of Point 2, in that we “substitute human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of the Scripture.”

For the same reason Synod falls under the judgment of Point 3, which deplores “all man-made walls and barriers and all ecclesiastical traditions, which would hinder the free course of the Gospel in the World.” It is quite incomprehensible to us how such a statement could be made. These man-made walls and barriers etc. could not be deplored if the signers of the Statement did not believe that they exist within our Synod. But where has our Synod ever erected any barriers to real and true mission work?

However, also this Point must be understood in the light of the purpose of the Statement. The Statement is not urging us to do more aggressive and intensive mission work in *the world and*

*among the unchurched*, but this Point rather refers to “various occasions of a public or ecclesiastical character,” to which any one may be invited to bear witness to his faith, it refers to bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel among *members of other churches, which already have tin Gospel*; it refers to preaching a sermon in a sectarian church, or to preaching one of a series of sermons arranged to prove that there is no difference in the principal doctrines among the various churches, whose pastors participate in the series. A service is a public affair of a congregation, and preaching a sermon in such a service is indeed a case of church fellowship, except if in that sermon we testify for the truth and against the error held by said congregation. This is what Christ and the Apostles did when they met with groups or individuals that held erroneous views. Within the framework of the Statement we can think of no other field in which the signatories may want to “preach the Gospel in all its truth and power” than those Christian churches which already have the Gospel, but do not yet agree with us in every point of doctrine.

But let us bear in mind, church fellowship is a reciprocal affair, it works both ways. If I accept an invitation to preach, say, in a Methodist church, the Methodist brother may justly expect an invitation to preach in my church. And church fellowship includes altar and pulpit fellowship. Are our pastors and our congregations ready to establish such church fellowship with any Christian church body which does not agree with us in doctrine?

No, our Synod has not erected barriers against preaching the Gospel to the unchurched and to the heathen, but in Rom. 16:17 God has erected a barrier against church fellowship with errorists.

The entire Statement must be studied in the light of its dominant purpose as this appears from the accompanying letter and especially from Points 5 and 11, namely that we introduce into our Synod a more liberal policy of church fellowship, to wit, that we no longer make differences in certain doctrines or in details of doctrine divisive of church fellowship.

In Point 5 of the Statement the fact is admitted that Rom. 16: 17, 18 has been applied to all Christians who differ from us in certain points of doctrine. And this has, indeed, been the position of our Synod in the past. But this fact is deplored. Hence we have here on the part of all the signatories of the Statement *a conscious departure from, and an open break with, the position of our Synod* on this particular point.

Since the Statement deplores the fact that the text was so applied, it must regard the position of our Synod as unscriptural and wrong, and therefore Synod is guilty of “substituting human judgments, synodical resolutions, or other sources of authority for the supreme authority of Scripture,” Point 2.

Since Synod lias so applied the text, and does not permit pulpit fellowship with churches that do not agree with us in doctrine, Synod is charged with erecting "man-made walls and barriers, and all ecclesiastical traditions which would hinder the free course of the Gospel in the world," Point 3, and with "narrow legalism," Point 1.

In Point 4 of the Statement we are charged with "a loveless and unscriptural attitude," which manifests itself in various ways. We ask the reader to study carefully Points 1, 2, and 3 of the Statement, also the letter which accompanied the Statement, and an essay "Protest and Appeal," which was read at the meeting of the 14, and then ask himself who has made more grievous charges and manifested a more loveless and unscriptural attitude.

The Statement must be rejected, and should be retracted, "in toto."

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